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ABSTRACT

Attitude changes by student teachers resulting from participation in early field-based experiences in an inner-city elementary school were examined. Introductory sophomore-level courses (Introduction to Exceptional Children, Foundations of Educational Thought, and Human Growth and Development) were offered to two groups of students in a field-based and a campus-based program. Two attitude scales were used to measure pre- and post-test attitudes of these selected groups. One, a semantic differential scale, was designed to measure attitudes toward the three courses and the teacher education program. The second instrument, a questionnaire, sampled the attitudes toward schooling and multicultural education. Results of the testing revealed that the field-based students became less positive in their attitudes toward schools and schooling while the attitude of the campus-based group remained the same or more positive. Both groups became more positive in their attitudes toward mainstreaming exceptional children. In their attitudes toward human development, the field-based students developed more positive attitudes toward people, while the campus-based group showed a tendency to become more negative. It can be concluded that, not only can early field-based experiences allow students to develop more realistic attitudes and expectations about the processes of schooling, but they can also provide an opportunity for self-assessment and can direct a student's career choice. (JD)

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THE INFLUENCE OF FIELD EXPERIENCES AND INTRODUCTORY PROFESSIONAL COURSES ON STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD AMERICAN EDUCATION

Paper presented at the 1981 Regional Mini-Clinic of the Association for Teacher Education.

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Teacher education program revisions usually include provisions for increased field-based experiences. It is believed that more field experiences are needed and that these should take place earlier in teacher training.

In the Spring of 1980 a joint project was undertaken by the College of Education at Memphis State University and the Teacher Corps Project, to offer a block of sophomore level teacher education courses in a field-based, laboratory setting. Introduction to the Exceptional Child (SPER 2000), Foundations of Educational Thought and Practice (EDFD 2011), and Human Growth and Development (EDPD 2111) were team taught at an inner-city, Teacher Corps elementary school in Memphis, TN.

Researchers were concerned with attitude changes that result from early field-based experiences in inner-city school settings. Of particular interest were changes in (1) attitudes toward American education, (2) attitudes toward handicapped students, (3) attitudes about human development, and (4) attitudes about teacher preparation.

Information is provided about the development of attitude scales used, the design of the field-based project, and a contrast of student attitudes in traditional and field-based courses.

PROCEDURES

All students seeking teacher certification through the College of Education are required to enroll in three "foundational" sophomore-level courses. These are usually the first courses in the professional education sequence and provide the first opportunity to acquaint students with the teaching profession. These courses are:

SPER 2000 Introduction to Exceptional Children (3)
Overview of special education including historical perspective of the field. Emphasis is placed on the characteristics and education of children and youth in each area of exceptionality.

EDFD 2011 Foundations of Educational Thought and Practice (3)
Origins, influences, and consequences of formal schooling in selected historical and contemporary contexts. Focus is on developing a critical perspective of policy proposals and resulting educational designs.

EDPS 2111 Human Growth and Development (3)
A life-span approach to principles and processes of human growth and development applied to educational processes.

It was hypothesized that these introductory courses, taught in a field-based setting, would provide students with information and experiences that would be invaluable for making career decisions and for future effectiveness in teaching.

The three courses were offered in a 9 semester-hour block (students were required to enroll in all three courses) and were team taught by faculty from the respective disciplines. The instructional team coordinated materials and activities to avoid duplication. A special effort was made to organize classes so that the information and experiences supplied by one instructor would support the others. Efforts were also made to use as many school facilities as possible for the field-based experiences. Students participated in all of the following: (1) presentation by the Assistant Superintendent of schools on policy issues, (2) classroom observation and participation (K-Junior High), (3) observation of Title I reading, math and computer assisted math programs, (4) participation in and observation of pupil-pupil interactions, teacher-pupil relationships, classroom organization, (5) discussions with the principal regarding school-community relations, impact of poverty, parent involvement, (6) discussions with parent advisory council, (7) observation and participation in self-contained and mainstreamed special education classrooms, (8) observation of alternative schools, (9) interaction with community service agencies, and (10) involvement with school functions (including lunch duty, hall duty, library, etc.).

SUBJECTS

Subjects for the field-based project were recruited by education guidance counselors. The two pre-requisites for participation in the project were: (1) Students had not taken any of the three 2000-level courses, and (2) They were willing to attend classes in the Teacher Corps elementary school. Out of more than 500 students enrolled in one or more 2000-level education courses less than 50 met the first requirement and 22 agreed to participate in the field-based project. Participants were older, and seemed more mature than the students who opted for the traditional campus offerings.

A second group, used for comparison, consisted of 12 students who enrolled in all three courses taught on campus. These students would receive similar content coverage but fewer field-based experiences.

Subjects for whom there was incomplete data (demographic or pre or post assessments) were excluded from the sample. Sixteen subjects were included in the field-based project sample and twelve in the comparison group on campus.

ATTITUDE SCALES

Two scales were developed to obtain pre and post attitude measures. The first was a 36 item semantic differential (Appendix A) and the second was a 50 item questionnaire (Appendix B).

The semantic differential was designed to measure attitudes in four areas. It contained four subscales, one to measure attitudes toward each of the three courses (American Public Schools, Mainstreaming, Human Development) and a fourth to measure attitudes about the perceived relevance and importance of the teacher preparation program (Teacher Education).

The second instrument was a questionnaire consisting of 50 Likert-type items. It was designed to sample the same attitudes as the semantic differential but included an additional subscale concerning multicultural education. Subscales on the questionnaire consisted of items randomly positioned through the instrument (Appendix B). They consisted of the following breakdown:

American Public Schools (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, 31, 33, 34, 37, 38, 40, 47, and 48)

Mainstreaming (2, 9, 21, 28, 36, and 42)

Human Development (12, 13, 14, 19, 29, 39, 45, 46, and 50)

Teacher Education (8, 20, 26, 27, 30, 35, 41, and 49)

Multicultural Education (10, 11, 16, 23, 24, 37, 38, 44, and 47)

Both instruments were constructed by the researchers. Coefficients of reliability for the scales are .60 on the pretest and .66 on the posttest (Cronbach Alph Coefficients).

The two instruments were administered to all students enrolled in any of the three courses (or combinations thereof) during the first two weeks of class in the Spring of 1980. Posttests were obtained during the final week of classes.

RESULTS

Pre and Post attitude assessment for subscales are provided in Table I for both Semantic and Questionnaire instruments. On the semantic instrument, the Teacher Corps group had higher pretest attitudes on all subscales than did the campus group. Posttest assessment for the Teacher Corps group showed the development of more positive attitudes toward the concepts of Mainstreaming and Human Development, and more negative attitudes toward American public schools and Teacher Preparation (although attitudes were still more positive than negative overall). The campus group developed more positive attitudes toward American Education and Mainstreaming but became more negative on subscales of Teacher Education and Human Development. As can be seen, both groups became more positive toward Mainstreaming and more negative toward Teacher Education programs.

On the questionnaire, the Teacher Corps group's pre and post assessment scores were slightly higher than the campus group. Both Teacher Corps and Campus, groups become more negative on the subscales Mainstreaming, Teacher Education, and Multicultural Education, attitudes about American public schools remained unchanged and attitudes about Human Development improved slightly.

Table I. Subscale Means and Standard Deviations for Teacher Corps and Comparison Groups

Attitude Subscales	Semantic[1]				Questionnaire[2]			
	Teacher Corps[3]		Comparison[4]		Teacher Corps		Comparison	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
American School	(.68) 4.34	(.74) 4.26	(.72) 3.74	(.57) 3.96	(.32) 2.90	(.41) 2.89	(.28) 2.68	(.29) 2.70
Mainstreaming	(.72) 4.52	(.65) 4.81	(.77) 4.03	(.74) 4.27	(.53) 2.85	(.46) 2.62	(.35) 2.83	(.53) 2.60
Human Development	(.67) 4.78	(.76) 5.08	(.70) 4.60	(.63) 4.27	(.25) 3.25	(.46) 3.33	(.30) 3.01	(.31) 3.13
Teacher Education	(.75) 6.20	(.97) 5.41	(.74) 5.94	(.78) 5.31	(.26) 3.42	(.41) 3.26	(.30) 3.43	(.31) 3.43
Multicultural Ed.[5]					(.39) 3.26	(.58) 3.23	(.42) 2.91	(.56) 2.94

1. A score of 4.0 denotes the neutral position
2. 1=disagree, 2=probably disagree, 3=probably agree, 4=agree
3. n=16
4. n=12
5. Subscale used in questionnaire only.

Discussion

As demonstrated in Table I, the Teacher Corps group began the project with more positive attitudes than did the Campus group. This may be a product of selection; people who are willing to enroll in a field-based course in an inner-city school may differ from the general population. It seemed to the researchers that these people were more motivated, more mature, and more committed to education as a career.

Attitudes toward American Education. Attitudes on this subscale became less positive for the Teacher Corps group (although they were still more positive than negative overall). They came to see public schools as less flexible, stimulating, permissive and less systematic than they had believed prior to the field experience. They also come to see less equality in public schools (questionnaire item 1), saw schools as less innovative (#4), saw public schools as a place where students are less likely to enjoy themselves (#5), saw schools as being less likely or able to modify cultural stereotypes (#10), saw teachers as less adequate (#34), and saw school administrators as less concerned with the development of each individual (#47). The Campus group attitudes either remained the same or became more positive on all items in this subscale on the semantic differential and the questionnaire.

These results should not be surprising. First, interactions with school realities have a way of reducing teachers' sometimes unrealistic ideas. It is common for student teachers and first year teachers to report disillusionment upon completing these experiences. After numerous school experiences, many teachers are able to re-evaluate their expectations, resolve some of the conflicts that classroom experiences bring about, and settle down to be effective teachers. Others become so disillusioned that they decide to quit teaching, or worse, become trapped into a profession for which they feel ill-prepared and ill-equipped. Early field-experiences provide an opportunity for prospective teachers to become more realistic about schools and teaching as a career. They may temper their idealism, and avoid later disappointment, and may make conscious efforts to acquire skills that will allow them to cope with the realities of life in the classrooms. The subjects in this study provide an opportunity to further test this hypothesis.

Attitudes toward Mainstreaming. In both Teacher Corps and Campus groups, attitudes (measured on the semantic instrument) about handicapped students improved after the course experiences. Both groups saw the Mainstreaming of handicapped students as consistent, supportive, and enriching. The Teacher Corps group also saw mainstreaming as more flexible and effective than the Campus group. Observing and interacting with students in a field-based setting may improve attitudes about the handicapped.

Attitudes toward Human Development. The Teacher Corps group developed more positive attitudes toward people (as measured on the semantic). They saw people as more predictable, warm, fair, worthy, organized, and more wise than did the Campus group. As a matter of fact, the Campus group's attitudes became more negative in all semantic items except warm and wise (although overall they were still more positive than negative).

It is possible that interacting with people in a field-based situation leads to more positive attitudes than hearing about people in an abstract classroom setting. Many people's ideas about human nature are built upon incomplete or erroneous information. Beliefs about inner-city schools and pupils are a case in point. It is possible that successful interaction with inner-city children allowed students to re-evaluate and improve their attitudes about human nature. Finding out that kids develop in lawful and somewhat predictable patterns, independent of social class or economic situation, has a way of strengthening attitudes about human nature.

Attitudes toward Teacher Preparation programs. Both groups' attitudes about teacher preparation programs become more negative. The Teacher Corps group experienced a greater drop in attitudes, but since they began the project with more positive attitudes, their post assessment attitudes were higher than the Campus group, and their overall attitudes were significantly more positive than negative.

On the questionnaire, the Teacher Corps group came to believe more strongly that instructors should be good role models (item #27), and they became more realistic (lowered their attitudes) about the importance and practicality of education courses (#30, 49). Both groups came to see their teacher education program as less systematic, less dynamic, less relevant, less active, less stimulating, less practical, less scholarly and less strong.

It seems this drop in attitudes is caused by the dampening of idealism, and may be a necessary step in preparing effective teachers. The field-based experiences provided a dose of realism that serves to bring expectations more in line with reality.

Conclusions

Early field-based experiences affect students' attitudes toward aspects of teacher preparation. Such experiences seem to allow students to develop more realistic attitudes and expectations about the processes of schooling and teaching. It would seem beneficial for students to go through this re-evaluation and reassessment early in their teacher education program.

Early field experiences can provide the opportunity for self-assessment and thus direct a person's career choices. Then there may be fewer students, who upon completing student teaching, find they are in the wrong profession. Another major benefit of early field experiences comes from the professional guidance and support that can be built into the experience. Students and instructors can discuss classroom events as they occur and thus integrate

theories and methods into a realistic and workable scheme. This type of mutual support interaction, and integrations of material is usually not available to student teachers or first year teaching situations.

Overall, it seems that early field-based expriences provide numerous benefits. Such experiences offer opportunities to improve the effectiveness of people completing teacher education programs.

ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION

PART I

1. I believe the American public school is:

rigid	: : : : : : :	flexible
organized	: : : : : : :	disorganized
boring	: : : : : : :	stimulating
permissive	: : : : : : :	restrictive
unsystematic	: : : : : : :	systematic
responsive	: : : : : : :	unresponsive
traditional	: : : : : : :	progressive
free	: : : : : : :	constrained
adequate	: : : : : : :	inadequate

2. Placing handicapped/exceptional children in regular classrooms (mainstreaming) is:

consistent	: : : : : : :	inconsistent
supportive	: : : : : : :	intimidating
stifling	: : : : : : :	enriching
required	: : : : : : :	voluntary
simple	: : : : : : :	complicated
restrictive	: : : : : : :	freeing
effective	: : : : : : :	ineffective
rejecting	: : : : : : :	accepting
flexible	: : : : : : :	rigid

3. I believe that people are basically:

predictable	: : : : : : :	unpredictable
flexible	: : : : : : :	rigid
indifferent	: : : : : : :	warm
fair	: : : : : : :	unfair
able	: : : : : : :	unable
unworthy	: : : : : : :	worthy
organized	: : : : : : :	disorganized
simple	: : : : : : :	complex
foolish	: : : : : : :	wise

4. I expect my teacher preparation program to be:

systematic	: : : : : : :	unsystematic
static	: : : : : : :	dynamic
irrelevant	: : : : : : :	relevant
passive	: : : : : : :	active
stimulating	: : : : : : :	boring
necessary	: : : : : : :	unnecessary
practical	: : : : : : :	impractical
unscholarly	: : : : : : :	scholarly
strong	: : : : : : :	weak

APPENDIX B

DIRECTIONS FOR
ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION
Part II

In this opinionaire there are 50 statements that you are asked to respond to quickly and frankly. All responses are strictly confidential. You will record your responses on the response sheet marked Part II.

If you agree with the statement, code response A. . . . . A B C D E

If you are somewhat uncertain, but probably agree, code response B . . . . . A B C D E

If your are somewhat uncertain, but probably disagree, code response C . . . . . A B C D E

If you disagree, code response D . . . . . A B C D E

PLEASE DO NOT MARK ON THE OPINIONAIRE. MARK ONLY ON THE RESPONSE SHEET.

PLEASE DO NOT OMIT ANY ITEMS. THANK YOU!

APPENDIX A

DIRECTIONS FOR
ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION
Part I

This is a semantic differential scale designed to survey your attitudes toward certain aspects of education.

On the following pages you will find a set of concepts followed by pairs of opposite adjectives below each concept. Between each pair of adjectives are seven dashes. You are to place a check mark on one of the seven positions. Your check mark should indicate how you feel about the concept. Once you have read the adjectives, respond quickly with your first reaction in relation to the concept.

Example:

Giving oral reports is:

relevant	: : : ✓ : : : :	irrelevant
time consuming	: : ✓ : : : : :	time well spent
weak	: : : : ✓ : : :	strong
interesting	: : : ✓ : : : :	dull
hard	: ✓ : : : : : :	easy
active	: ✓ : : : : : :	passive

By checking the third space from the left between relevant and irrelevant, you have indicated that you feel that giving oral reports is more relevant than irrelevant, but not extremely relevant.

By checking the second space on the scale between time consuming and time well spent, you have indicated that you consider making oral reports quite time consuming.

Continue responding to each scale in the same way until you have completed all the scales, then move on the next concept.

Turn the page for the first concept and record your responses directly on the survey questionnaire.

ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION
Part II

1. Equality in education exists in most public schools.

2. Special classes for exceptional children do more harm than good.

3. Public funds should be used to help finance private and parochial schools.

4. A variety of instructional materials and innovative strategies are reflected in most public schools today.

5. Public schools today are places where children and youth enjoy spending twelve or more years of their lives.

6. Curriculum content in today's schools is essentially the same as it was in the 1940's and 1950's.

7. There are certain attitudes every teacher should have.

8. There is one right way to train a teacher.

9. Learning problems can be solved with sensitive and resourceful teachers.

10. Schools are doing a good job in helping children and youth modify some of the cultural stereotypes held by adults.

11. Teachers should avoid discussing with students those community problems that involve minority groups.

12. Children today have it easier than we did when we were young.

13. In order to fully understand human growth and development, it is necessary to interact with children and adults.

14. My self-image is the most important factor determining my behavior.

15. People are basically able to cope with problems confronting them.

16. Intercultural contacts within the school setting demonstrate the inherent superiority of some cultures.

17. Classroom discipline should be adjusted to match the type of discipline the child has experienced at home.

18. The neighborhood school concept is one that should be valued by all segments of the community.

19. Human beings grow and develop in lawful and predictable ways.

20. Ability to teach is somehting you have naturally and this cannot be taught.

21. Most classrooms do not adapt to individual difference in children.

22. There are certain competencies every teacher must have and they should be tested for these competencies.

23. Parents of inner-city youngsters are not really interested in how or what their children do in school.

24. Inner-city schools are definitely inferior to those found in the suburban areas.

25. Consideration should be given to eliminating compulsory school attendance requirements.

26. It's important for prospective teachers to spend a lot of time in K-12 schools with students.

27. The instructors in education courses should be good role models for prospective teachers.

28. Labeling a child 'retarded', 'disturbed', 'blind,' is inappropriate.

29. People generally do not do the best they can under the circumstances.

30. The most important courses in my bachelor's program are my education courses.

31. Parents should have more to say about the way schools are run and the way children are taught.

32. Exceptional children require a curriculum radically different from normal children.

33. Grouping of children according to standardized test scores is an acceptable educational practice.

34. The majority of teachers do an adequate job.

35. There is the opportunity in the teacher preparation program for me to pursue some of my own interests.

36. Knowing the cause of a child's handicap is not necessary to planning appropriate learning experiences for the child.

37. I believe that teaching in an inner-city school would be a personally rewarding experience.

38. Differences in achievement between inner-city children and others can be attributed to genetics and heredity.

39. How we behave depends on how we see a situation.

40. Legal right of children and youth are being adequately protected in most schools today.

41. Education courses are easy.

42. Public education adequately serves most handicapped individuals.

43. Present use of I.Q. tests is frequently inappropriate.

44. Schools should have students representing various socio-economic, racial, and religious groups.

45. Human behavior is generally not rational or understandable.

46. The first few years of life are not important in the development of adult personality.

47. All students should be expected to attain the same standards of achievement, regardless of their family backgrounds and, personal motivations.

48. Most school administrators are concerned about the intellectual moral, and social development of each learner.

49. Education courses are not practical.

50. Children have the ability to think like adults.